

Academician DAVOR MILIČIĆ

(1915 – 1993)

In memoriam

DAVOR MILIČIĆ (Professor Miličić to his associates), prominent Croatian biologist and plant virologist, retired professor of the Department of Botany, Faculty of Science, Zagreb University, and longtime member of the Editorial Board of *Acta Botanica Croatica*, died on 19 December 1993 in 77 years of age. Born in Zadar he moved to Split, where he got the classic humanistic education. He obtained his B. Sc. (Biochemistry group) from the Faculty of Philosophy and received his Ph. D. degree at the Faculty of Science, University of Zagreb. From 1941, during the Second World War, he worked as a grammar school teacher at the Island of Brač, and afterwards in a refugee camp in El Shatt (Egypt). Following a short employment at the Oceanographic Institute in Split, in 1945 he accepted the post of assistant in the Department of Botany, Faculty of Philosophy, Zagreb. In 1956, after habilitation, he became assistant professor at the Zagreb Faculty of Science, where he remained on the staff until his retirement in 1985. He was elected associate professor in 1959, and full professor in the year 1964. From 1970 – 1981 Professor Miličić held the office of Director of the Botany Department and Botanical Garden. During that time he was also a visiting professor at the Universities of Split, Sarajevo and Ljubljana.

Professor Miličić began as plant anatomist. His Ph. D. Thesis »Contributions to the Synthesis of Functional Anatomy of Fruits« contains most of his work in this field. However, he early connected the investigation in plant anatomy with plant virology which became his lifetime research interest. Professor Miličić was one of the founders of plant virus research in Croatia, where thanks to his efforts the first proper plant virus laboratory was established. The object of his investigation were virus cell inclusions arising inside plant cell under the influence of virus infection. Papers in this field brought him world-wide reputation. In the early sixties he wrote the first of his numerous, significant papers on cytopathologic changes influenced by viruses. It referred to cell inclusions of cactus virus X. His deep insight into the plant organism structure later produced a series of outstanding papers on

anatomic changes provoked in plant tissue and organs by viruses. This group includes papers dealing with diseases of fruit trees such as apple stem grooving, pear blister canker, pear bark split and others.

In the early seventies Professor Miličić obtained substantial funds for scientific work from the University of Zagreb and equipped his Laboratory with glasshouses, rabbitry, centrifuges and other equipment necessary for more fundamental research into viruses. He had four young associates at the time, and began team-work in his Laboratory. He regularly contributed to the leading phytopathology journal »Phytopathologische Zeitschrift«. He also published papers in prominent journals such as »Protoplasma«, »Virology«, »Naturwissenschaften«, »Biologia Plantarum« and others. In these papers he presented new views of inclusions and properties of cactus virus X, viruses of cruciferous plants, tobamoviruses and some others.

In the last twenty years Professor Miličić studied viruses which attack different plant species. He investigated viruses of vegetable and woody plants, as well as those of cereals and ornamental species. In collaboration with electron microscopists from Ruđer Bošković Institute, Zagreb and Faculty of Science in Sarajevo he achieved notable results in the investigation of submicroscopic structure of cell inclusions of some potyviruses, tobamoviruses, rhabdoviruses, broad bean wilt virus and some others. Although his main interest was fundamental investigation including, especially in the last years, studies at the molecular level, he also aimed at helping phytopathologists in controlling the virus diseases of more important agricultural plants. Knowing that without reliable virus identification there is no successful control, he performed numerous identification tests. Already in the early sixties he tried to determine which particular viruses were the most wide-spread in this country. At that time he became closely associated with the well-known Croatian virologist Dr. Milan Panjan of the Institute for Plant Protection in Zagreb.

Professor Miličić was a careful experimenter and working under him was excellent education. He tutored a number of specialists in the field of plant virology. Five of them (his closest associates) work at the Botany Department in Zagreb; others are in scientific institutions all over the former Yugoslavia. With intention of raising the research level in his Laboratory he was in contact with colleagues from virology centres in many European and overseas countries. He occasionally published joint papers with quite a number of scientists from Germany, Austria, Italy, Bulgaria, Hungary, USA, etc. A scientist of international reputation he was invited by many scientific institutions to visit their laboratories. He also encouraged his close associates to work in some leading virology laboratories in Great Britain, Germany, Austria, Hungary, USA and Italy. During his lifetime of devotion to research he published, mostly in co-authorship with his associates, about 120 scientific papers and participated in many scientific meetings at home and abroad. In *Acta Botanica Croatica* he published a number of papers helping to establish a journal recognized by the world scientific community. He wrote most of his papers in English, even those published in Croatian journals, making his work available to a wider scientific public.

Professor Miličić was a dedicated and respected teacher of graduate and postgraduate courses in virology, plant anatomy and plant physiology. During his long pedagogic activity at the University of Zagreb he attempted to



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improve the teaching standards in his field. He wrote for students highly regarded hand-books »Plant Anatomy« and »Plant Physiology«. For several years he also worked for education authorities and for School Television, for the Školska Knjiga publishing house and the Lexicographic Institute, significantly contributing to the improvement of our secondary school and university systems. He was interested in popularization of natural sciences and wrote for the Croatian journal of popular science *Priroda*.

By his entire work as scientist, pedagogue, popularizer and organizer of science, Professor Miličić made an enormous contribution to the botanic science and science in general. He won many honours and distinctions during his life. In 1970 he was honoured by the Memory Medal Award on the occasion of 25th Anniversary of the Liberation of Zagreb; in 1973 he was elected extraordinary member of the Academy of Sciences and Arts in Croatia (Section for Natural Sciences); in 1975 he received Ruder Bošković Scientific Award of the Republic of Croatia; in 1983 he received the Award for his Life Work from the Republic of Croatia. Finally, in 1986 he was elected full member of the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

Professor Miličić will be remembered and honoured as a scientist who promoted the cult of work and scientific truth. He was a man of many intellectual accomplishments, of which his indefatigable zeal and persistence were perhaps the greatest. Quiet and unassuming by nature he never expected to achieve any material gains from his work, to which he devoted himself as a genuine enthusiast. For all he did in the 78 years of his life he deserves genuine respect. Those who knew him and worked under his aegis will treasure his memory.

ZLATA ŠTEFANAC and NADA PLEŠE